

**we engage**

**ACTION ON  
Curriculum**

**Summary of Findings  
Research Roundtables 1, 2 and 3**

**Education Program Standards and Assessment  
September 2011**

**Government  
of Alberta** ■

*Alberta* ■

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents.....	i
Introduction.....	1
Purpose .....	1
Background .....	2
Action on Curriculum .....	2
Goals and Objectives of the Roundtables .....	2
Design of the Roundtables.....	3
Participants and Attendance .....	3
Collection and Analysis of Findings.....	4
Findings of the Research Roundtables.....	5
Roundtable 1 .....	5
Key Concept: Competencies.....	5
Key Concept: Literacy and Numeracy .....	6
Key Concept: Interdisciplinary Learning.....	7
Roundtable 2.....	9
Key Concept: Ways of Knowing .....	9
Key Concept: Student-centred/Personalized Learning .....	10
Key Concept: Breadth and Depth .....	10
Key Concept: Interdisciplinary Curriculum .....	11
Roundtable 3.....	13
Key Concept: Flexible Timing and Pacing in a Variety of Learning Environments.....	13
Key Concept: Responsive Curriculum .....	14
Key Concept: Assessment of Competencies .....	16
Key Concept: Assessment.....	16
Next Steps.....	18
Appendix A .....	19
Participant Evaluation .....	19



## INTRODUCTION

### PURPOSE

This report summarizes the findings from the three *Action on Curriculum* research roundtables and contains common understandings<sup>1</sup> derived from these discussions that will be used to help inform and shape the design of future curriculum (provincial programs of study, assessment, learning and teaching resources).

Three roundtables were held in the spring of 2011 as part of *Action on Curriculum*. The roundtables brought together education partners and stakeholders to share, interpret, review and discuss research<sup>2</sup>, literature reviews and article summaries<sup>3</sup>, and share practical experiences and knowledge. The roundtables provided an opportunity to develop common understandings of key concepts identified in *Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans* and *Inspiring Action on Education* for consideration in future curriculum design.

The following chart lists the key concepts addressed at each roundtable.

Research Roundtable	Key Concepts Addressed	Date and Place
One	Competencies Literacy and Numeracy Interdisciplinary Learning	April 11–12, 2011 Calgary
Two	Ways of Knowing Student-centred/Personalized Learning Breadth and Depth Interdisciplinary Curriculum	May 6–7, 2011 Calgary
Three	Flexible Timing and Pacing in a Variety of Learning Environments Responsive Curriculum <sup>4</sup> Assessment of Competencies Assessment	May 30–31, 2011 Edmonton

<sup>1</sup> A common understanding is a description of a co-created and agreed upon view of a concept and/or aspects of a concept and what it could look like within a given context.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of the research roundtables, *research* was defined as the gathering of data, information and facts in order to discover (new) information to reach a new understanding. This definition was derived from Cambridge Dictionaries Online ([http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/research\\_1](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/research_1)) and Experiment-Resources.com (<http://www.experiment-resources.com/definition-of-research.html#xzz1VPMInEpl>).

<sup>3</sup> These were summaries of qualitative and quantitative studies, scholarly reviews, and expert opinions.

<sup>4</sup> Responsive curriculum means curriculum responsive to the student, the student's learning environment and evolving societal needs.



## BACKGROUND

### ACTION ON CURRICULUM

*Action on Curriculum* is one of six Action Agenda initiatives that support the transformation of Alberta's Kindergarten to Grade 12 education system. *Action on Curriculum* supports government's strategic direction outlined in *Inspiring Action on Education* (2010) and reflects Education's commitment to continually improve its work in providing a world-class, student-centred curriculum now and in the future. "Engaging curriculum that inspires every student, every day" is the *Action on Curriculum* guiding vision. The overall aim is to ensure Alberta's curriculum (provincial programs of study, assessment, learning and teaching resources) remains responsive and relevant for students. A goal of *Action on Curriculum* is to design standards and guidelines for curriculum and associated curriculum development processes that are informed by evidence and effective practices. The result is to achieve a current and relevant curriculum for all Alberta students.

The roundtables fostered dialogue among partners and stakeholders to develop shared language and common understandings of key concepts related to curriculum design. Arriving at common understandings of key concepts will enable development of guiding principles to help frame the standards and guidelines for the development of future curriculum by Alberta Education.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE ROUNDTABLES

The two goals of the research roundtables were:

1. moving toward a common Alberta understanding of the key concepts that are foundational to the redesign of standards and guidelines for provincial curriculum and the associated curriculum development processes
2. adding to the pool of research available to inform *Action on Curriculum* and curriculum redesign approaches.

The process objectives of the research roundtables were:

1. exploring and sharing research findings among education partners/stakeholders, academics, practitioners and department staff.
2. involving and supporting a wide range of participants in building collaborative, co-creative relationships for transformative change.



## DESIGN OF THE ROUNDTABLES

A working group consisting of ministry staff and representatives from external stakeholder groups provided leadership for the planning and organization of each of the roundtables. The working group members collected and shared literature reviews of research related to key concepts for discussion at the roundtables. An appreciative inquiry approach<sup>5</sup> was used to engage in a dialogic process with participants.

The following three phases of appreciative inquiry were adapted to structure the roundtables consisting of up to eight participants, a facilitator and a recorder at each table.

**Discovery:** Delegates identify what they know about the key concepts by sharing their stories, personal experiences or research.

**Dream:** Delegates imagine the possibilities as they relate to the key concepts and create images of what the future would look like once attained.

**Design:** Delegates co-create common understandings for the key concepts.

Prior to each roundtable, delegates were asked to review articles and article summaries provided to them through Moodle™. They were also asked to bring to the roundtables any literature reviews of research they had collected, or information they had on research activities that they may have been personally involved with related to the key concepts. Over the two-day experience, delegates were engaged in a variety of planned activities to facilitate understandings of the key concepts. These included reviewing article summaries, listening to keynote addresses, viewing video clips and PowerPoint presentations, engaging in table conversations and participating in panel discussions.

During the roundtables, delegates worked together in assigned groups with a facilitator to co-develop a common understanding for each key concept.

## PARTICIPANTS AND ATTENDANCE

Participants at the roundtables consisted of representatives from the major education stakeholder groups, including The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), the Council of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS), the Alberta School Councils Association (ASCA), and the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA). Administrators, teachers and students from Alberta's school authorities participated, as well as students from the Minister's Student Advisory Council. Educators from post-secondary institutions made up another segment of the participants. There were delegates from First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) colleges and schools. In addition, members of the employer and business communities were in attendance.

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<sup>5</sup> Appreciative Inquiry is an approach based on the strengths of a system or an organization. The approach looks to appreciate the knowledge that people have through an analysis of the current system and to leverage the strength of this knowledge through exploration and deep inquiry in an environment of collaboration. The approach looks to move change through the power of knowledge and to dream and design a future that is created and understood by all.



Research Roundtables	Attendance
Roundtable 1: April 11–12, 2011, Calgary	141
Roundtable 2: May 6–7, 2011, Calgary	145
Roundtable 3: May 30–31, 2011, Edmonton	201

The total number of participants for all three roundtables was 487. Of these participants, 75 attended more than one of the research roundtables. Refer to Appendix A for participants' evaluation of the research roundtables.

## **COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

Information was collected during the roundtables through delegate notes and illustrations and recorders' notes of the table conversations. Collaborative online tools (Titan Pad™ or Google Docs™) were used by the table recorders to electronically capture the participant discussions as they occurred. Following each roundtable, the common themes/understandings from the table dialogues were compiled in Event Overviews.

The findings that follow are organized according to key concept, a summary of the process for exploring the key concept, followed by the common understandings for the key concept derived from a collation of the information collected from table dialogues. Each common understanding represents an analysis of the ideas and themes that emerged from the table dialogues around each key concept.



## FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH ROUNDTABLES

### ROUNDTABLE 1

#### KEY CONCEPT: COMPETENCIES

##### Process for Exploring the Key Concept

Delegates prepared for the roundtable by reading literature reviews and article summaries of research and other relevant documents posted on the conference Moodle™. The readings included Alberta Education's *Inspiring Action on Education* (2010) and The Alberta Teachers' Association's *Changing Landscapes for Learning Our Way to the Next Alberta*. During the discovery and dream phases, delegates shared experiences and articles about competency development, and reviewed the competencies and attributes of an educated Albertan outlined in *Inspiring Action on Education* (2010) (Figure 1 on page 7) and imagined a future where competencies had been fully implemented in provincial curriculum. Ideas from the discover and dream phases were used to draft the common understanding.

##### A Common Understanding of Competencies

A competency is an interrelated set of attitudes, skills and knowledge that is drawn upon and applied to a particular context needed for successful learning and living.

Delegates gave feedback that all of the competencies described in *Inspiring Action on Education* (2010) are essential for an educated Albertan in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and critical for realizing the vision of an engaged thinker and ethical citizen with an entrepreneurial spirit.

Delegates further characterized competencies as:

- essential for life and citizenship and developed over a lifetime
- transcending subject-area boundaries
- inclusive of the attributes of flexibility, adaptability and resiliency for managing change
- encompassing of responsibility and stewardship in the global context
- focusing on the importance of personal well being throughout schooling and life
- recognizing the foundational nature of literacy and numeracy for all competency development.



## **KEY CONCEPT: LITERACY AND NUMERACY**

### **Process for Exploring the Key Concept**

In advance of the roundtable, delegates were asked to read two Alberta Education documents, *Literacy First: A Plan for Action (2010)* and *Numeracy: A Discussion Paper (draft 2011)*. Delegates were encouraged to read summarized information on literacy and numeracy from a wide variety of other sources provided on the Moodle™ and to bring and share their own literature reviews of research on these concepts. Delegates considered questions such as: How are literacy and numeracy foundational to learning?, and reflected on the definition of literacy in *Literacy First: A Plan for Action (2010)*. They identified ideas that would be important in the development of a common understanding of numeracy.

### **A Common Understanding of Literacy**

Literacy is acquiring, creating, connecting and communicating meaning in a wide variety of contexts (*Literacy First: A Plan for Action, 2010*).

Delegates described literacy and numeracy as:

- foundational to the development of all competencies
- linked by the use of symbols, sets of lenses, operations and applications for functioning in a verbal or numeric world.

### **A Common Understanding of Numeracy**

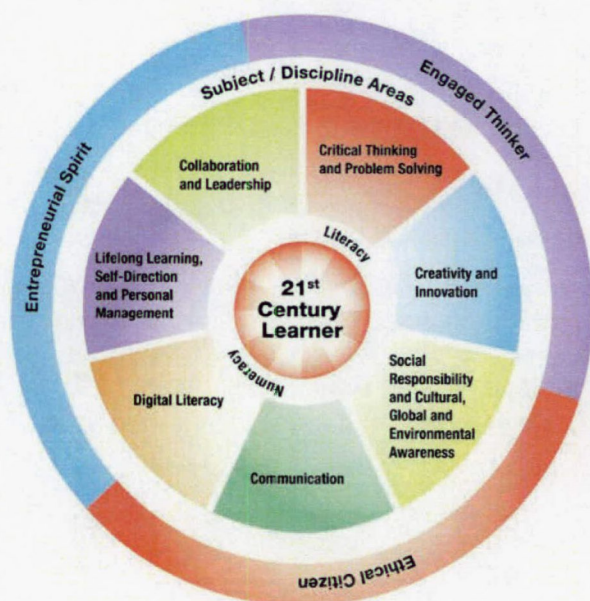
Numeracy is the ability and confidence to deal effectively with the quantitative aspects of life (at school, at home, at work, and in the community) and to appreciate the impact of the application of mathematics in today's world.

Delegates further characterized numeracy as:

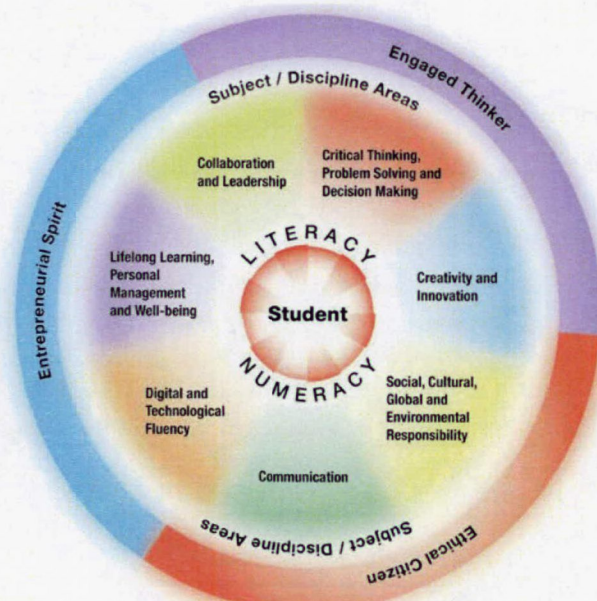
- the ability to process, communicate and interpret mathematical information in a variety of contexts
- the practical understanding of ways in which information is gathered by counting and measuring
- what one does to get through everyday life; it is needed every day to function
- skills that include analyzing, computation, estimation and measurement.



The input from Roundtable 1 and other engagements with stakeholders over the past year have been used to design a revised graphic of a framework for student learning (Figure 2 below). The student, placed in the centre, reflects the focus of education. Revised titles of two competency categories clarify their scope. Enlarged font size for literacy and numeracy emphasizes their foundational nature. Blurred lines between sections of the graphic better convey the interconnected nature of the competencies.



**Figure 1:** Draft graphic from *Inspiring Action on Education* (2010)<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 2:** Revised graphic from *Framework for Student Learning: Competencies of Engaged Thinkers and Ethical Citizens with an Entrepreneurial Spirit* (2011)

These are two of many possible graphics that could be used to illustrate the framework for student learning.

## KEY CONCEPT: INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING

### Process for Exploring the Key Concept

During the discovery phase, delegates viewed the video, *Common Sense: An Overview of Integrated Studies*<sup>7</sup>, and described tasks and activities that connect two or more discipline areas of study. Based on personal experiences and a review of the descriptions and definitions in literature reviews and articles, delegates identified what was most helpful in developing a common understanding of interdisciplinary learning within an Alberta context. During the dream phase, delegates described the learning possibilities for students experiencing interdisciplinary learning. From these descriptions, they identified themes of interdisciplinary learning for developing a common understanding.

<sup>6</sup> Alberta Education. (2010). *Inspiring action on education: A discussion paper*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Edutopia. *Common sense: An overview of integrated studies* (<http://www.edutopia.org/integrated-studies-overview-video>). Downloaded free-of-charge at <http://itunes.apple.com/itunes-u/integrated-studies/id3955440443>



### **A Common Understanding of Interdisciplinary Learning**

Interdisciplinary learning brings together diverse disciplines in a comprehensive manner, enabling students to extend their learning, access higher-order thinking skills and develop meaningful understandings of complex interactions amongst themselves, their community and the world around them.

Delegates further characterized interdisciplinary learning as:

- learning beyond the classroom through everyday learning activities that integrate subject/discipline areas through real-life applications
- drawing from the perspectives of two or more disciplines to foster critical thinking and independent and self-directed learning
- supporting authentic community engagement that creates an opportunity to draw upon attitudes, skills and knowledge from multiple disciplines within real-life contexts
- greater understanding of the place and importance of a subject and how the subject lives in the local community and culture, enabling respect for the voice of culture and community.

The understandings of interdisciplinary learning developed during Roundtable 1 were used to inform exploration of the key concept of interdisciplinary curriculum during Roundtable 2.

## ROUNDTABLE 2

### KEY CONCEPT: WAYS OF KNOWING

#### Process for Exploring the Key Concept

The discovery phase began with a personal story on indigenous ways of knowing from Dr. Betty Bastien of the University of Calgary. At their tables, delegates shared their own personal stories about learning acquired in non-traditional ways that had a profound impact on their lives. Delegates then highlighted key ideas in article summaries and literature reviews of research that could be used to inform the concept of ways of knowing. They shared and analyzed these ideas with others at the table, considering which could provide a deeper understanding of the concept. During the dream/design phase, keynote speaker Dr. Dwayne Donald of the University of Alberta, presented how he saw “ways of knowing” becoming an integral part of curriculum and delegates created a visual representation of their table’s understanding of ways of knowing.

#### A Common Understanding of Ways of Knowing

Ways of knowing is about learning that is experiential and meaningful to the individual and to the community to which he or she belongs. It is about balance and the connections that exist between the learner, the context in which learning occurs, and the fluidity of knowledge shared and gained through relationships. It is holistic, organic and transforming as the learner becomes one with their world.

Delegates further characterized ways of knowing as:

- fluid and contextual, encompassing traditions, experiences, culture, experimentation, visualization and intuition—linking the cultural diversity within a community with the culture of a discipline in a manner that enriches both
- circular and beginning with the individual—learning that is intergenerational, based on relationships, time and place
- in balance with a sense of place, intellect and emotions, and the universe that considers ethics and ecology through respect and creativity—people are at the centre through their collective consciousness and wisdom; learning is authentic and universal
- a kaleidoscope of ways of seeing the world, where there are various and shifting views and understandings that further develop the engaged thinker, who is an ethical citizen with an entrepreneurial spirit
- personal, meaningful, experiential and connected to the learner in contexts that come from the sharing of knowledge between people and the land
- based on students’ relationships and experiences between the spiritual and physical aspects of their lives; built on foundations from the past, but not held back by it.

Delegates recommended that the key concept of ways of knowing needs to be considered within other facets of learning as it relates to learning preferences or modalities. It was suggested that an exploration of the distinction between ways of knowing and ways of learning would be useful.



## **KEY CONCEPT: STUDENT-CENTRED/PERSONALIZED LEARNING**

### **Process for Exploring the Key Concept**

The discovery phase began with an invitation to share a personal story about a learning experience that was personalized. Delegates described what the experience looked like and how it made them feel as learners. Delegates identified the key ideas presented in the article summaries, shared them with the members at the table and worked together to group them by themes. Each table of delegates used these themes to come to understanding of the key concept and consider the essential design features required for future curriculum that could help enable more student-centred/personalized learning.

### **A Common Understanding of Student-centred/Personalized Learning**

Student-centred/personalized learning focuses on learners—their individual needs, passions, interests and learning abilities—encompassing meaningful connections, engaging learning experiences and flexible learning environments while supporting choice, collaboration, student voice and shared ownership (co-investment) in learning.

Delegates further characterized student-centred/personalized learning as:

- making meaningful connections that are authentic, holistic, deep in nature, engaging and purposeful
- providing flexible learning environments that are responsive to the learner: an approach that supports students through scaffolded learning outcomes and resources
- allowing for student voice, where the “journey of learning” is guided by their passions, interests and choices, and where they are co-investors in their learning, taking ownership for the decisions they make regarding their learning
- a social activity where students develop relationships and co-create knowledge in a dynamic, interactive process in which feedback is given to support their learning
- premised on students’ strengths and paced to meet their needs and interests while promoting intergenerational (lifelong) learning.

## **KEY CONCEPT: BREADTH AND DEPTH**

### **Process for Exploring the Key Concept**

During the discovery phase, delegates reflected on “when it is important to know a lot about something” and “when it was helpful to know a few things about a broad range of topics.” Delegates listened to keynote speaker, Dr. Rita Irwin of the University of British Columbia, shared learnings from a review of article summaries, and used a metaphor—*The Tree of Knowledge*—to define depth and breadth. Delegates placed their ideas on the tree diagram in the following manner:

- roots: what students need to know in depth
- branches: what students need to know in broad terms
- trunk: what could pertain to both breadth and depth.

Delegates used the metaphor to develop their understanding of the key concept.



### **A Common Understanding of Breadth and Depth**

*Breadth* resides in the bodies of knowledge (disciplines) that allow for broad exploration and learning. *Depth of understanding* relates to the analytical connections and critical thinking required for deep engagement. Together, breadth and depth are in a constant, dynamic relationship interconnecting knowledge and skill development and leading to significant, relevant and meaningful learning.

Delegates further characterized breadth (broad exploration) and depth (deep understanding) as:

- an ever changing state, with the “surface” or the start of something (a path, a road, a journey) being breadth, and further investigation or explorations (under water, over a hill, down a path) as depth
- breadth being the general knowledge, subjects and disciplines found in curriculum with depth as a focus on the analytical, critical connections, critical thinking, and inter-subject connections which expand across both discipline and metacognitive skills
- overarching themes (breadth) defined by learning outcomes that lead to deep understanding (depth)
- a dynamic relationship that encourages significant learning and real application
- a range of interconnected concepts that are relevant and meaningful to students, enabling them to acquire and apply knowledge more deeply in their interest areas
- the engagement of a dynamic tension (disequilibrium) between and among integrated disciplines.

### **KEY CONCEPT: INTERDISCIPLINARY CURRICULUM**

#### **Process for Exploring the Key Concept**

Delegates used self-assessment to rate their understanding of this key concept, then described what they may have experienced or observed as an interdisciplinary learning experience within curriculum. To further their comprehension of the concept, delegates reviewed article summaries and participated in an interdisciplinary learning activity intended to provide a common experience. A draft description of the key concept of interdisciplinary learning from Research Roundtable 1 was used to further develop an understanding of interdisciplinary curriculum.

### **A Common Understanding of Interdisciplinary Curriculum**

An interdisciplinary curriculum is built on big ideas and questions that bridge subject/discipline areas enabling integrated, relevant, authentic learning experiences related to real-world problems and contexts. It is flexible and responsive to student needs, and permits students to make meaningful connections and to develop competencies needed for living, learning and working.



Delegates further characterized interdisciplinary curriculum as:

- the opportunity to build bridges between subject/discipline areas and to bring relevance and authenticity to the learning experiences of students
- experiences that allow students to see the practical connections to real-world problems and examples
- an integrated approach to developing competencies that draws upon differences in individuals, content and situations
- the ongoing use of assessment tools that involves an informative process, enabling learners to better understand themselves and their needs
- flexible, responsive and collaborative, using common language and clear, “user-friendly” outcomes that focus on big ideas and key questions.

## ROUNDTABLE 3

Roundtable 3 provided delegates with a choice of engaging in one of two concept groupings.

Group 1 discussed the following key concepts:

- Flexible Timing and Pacing in a Variety of Learning Environments
- Curriculum Responsive to the Student, the Student's Learning Environment and Evolving Societal Needs (Responsive Curriculum)

Group 2 discussed the following key concepts:

- Assessment of Competencies
- Assessment

The overarching nature of responsive curriculum provided a connection and culmination to concepts discussed in all three roundtables.

### **KEY CONCEPT: FLEXIBLE TIMING AND PACING IN A VARIETY OF LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**

#### **Process for Exploring the Key Concept**

In the dream/design phases, delegates imagined the possibilities related to the concepts and created scenarios or images of what the future would look like once flexible timing and pacing in a variety of learning environments was attained. Using templates, triads reflected on what curriculum (programs of study, assessment, learning and teaching resources) might look like in 2020 and developed profiles of student learning in 2020, based on a provided demographic. Beginning with a student image and descriptions of the student, a template was used to describe the optimal learning experience through an identification of the timing, pacing and learning environment that they felt would best meet the student's learning needs. Profiles were shared between twinned tables. Based on the work accomplished in the discovery and dream phases, table delegates co-created their understanding for the key concept.

#### **A Common Understanding of Flexible Timing and Pacing in a Variety of Learning Environments**

Student learning experiences can occur within and beyond the traditional school (any place) and outside the traditional school, day or year (anytime) through face-to-face or online learning (synchronous and asynchronous), or as a blended experience enabling the co-creation of knowledge using current and emerging technologies as tools. Individual ways of knowing and ways of learning (progressive flexibility) are taken into consideration with the time and pace (rate and duration) that learning occurs.



Delegates further characterized flexible timing and pacing in a variety of learning environments as:

- students taking greater ownership (choice and readiness to learn) for their own learning
- teachers becoming facilitators, mentors, coaches and guides
- problem- or project-based learning, which is enabled by rich information and communications technology environments with flexible assessments and learning and teaching resources
- enhanced relationships among students, teachers and the community
- facilitation of student progression at a level suitable to their learning needs, capabilities, interests and passions
- aggregation and disaggregation of learning outcomes, assessments and learning and teaching resources to permit scaffolding at a time, a pace and in a setting that optimizes student potential and engagement to meet their needs.

## **KEY CONCEPT: RESPONSIVE CURRICULUM**

### **Process for Exploring the Key Concept**

In the exploration phase delegates reflected on the keynote by Dr. Mary Ann Wolf of the Alliance for Excellent Education and the Education Development Center on how curriculum that is responsive to the needs of students' learning today and in the future subsumes all concepts being discussed during the three roundtables, including assessment and how student engagement can be supported by various technology tools and systems. During the dream phase, delegates imagined the possibilities related to the concept of responsive curriculum to create what the future might look like. Delegates read a scenario describing the new 2020 Alberta curriculum. They assumed different roles such as teacher/administrator, student, parent, community member, employer or post secondary educator and identified, from their role's perspective, programs of study, assessment and learning and teaching resources. Each table member shared their ideas, and common elements were captured on a template by the official recorder. In the design phase delegates created a common understanding for the concept of responsive curriculum and used a template to identify the characteristics of programs of study, assessment, and learning and teaching resources that would be included in a responsive curriculum.

### **A Common Understanding of Responsive Curriculum**

Curriculum (programs of study, assessment, learning and teaching resources) that is responsive to the student is flexible, allowing students to bring their ways of knowing and ways of learning to explore broadly and gain deeper understandings of bodies of knowledge. Curriculum that is responsive allows students to apply these understandings within dynamic local and global contexts.

Programs of study enable student-centred/personalized learning and identify enduring understandings and developmental learning outcomes that encompass competencies to meet the learning needs of all students.

Assessments measure the levels of a student's success as aligned with learning outcomes, are meaningful, clear, dynamic, timely, ongoing, and embedded in real-world contexts.

Learning and teaching resources provide students with equitable opportunities to engage in broad exploration of bodies of knowledge and deep understanding of concepts. These learning and teaching resources provide a range of authentic and relevant experiences that can be holistic, experiential, interactive and hands-on.

Delegates further characterized programs of study as:

- providing opportunities for interdisciplinary learning and inquiry
- relevant and responsive learner outcomes reflecting emerging events, technologies, community and societal needs
- flexible to enable broad exploration and deep understanding of concepts
- supporting a collaborative approach among teachers, students, parents/caregivers and the community to develop learning experiences for meeting local needs.

Delegates further characterized assessments as:

- supportive of all learning styles
- accessible for all students
- evidence of student learning supported in a variety of ways including self, peer and teacher assessments; rubrics; tests (print and online); performance assessments and teacher-recorded observation
- available in print or digital formats
- formative assessment, collected over a period of time, promoting dialogue between the student and the teacher and among peers in facilitating mastery of learning outcomes
- summative assessment, collected at a single point in time, providing evidence of cumulative learning of broad exploration of bodies of knowledge and deep understanding of concepts
- students demonstrating contextual learning; accessing and analyzing information to represent what they know.

Delegates further characterized learning and teaching resources as:

- facilitating the development of individual learning paths that are student-centred and personalized, recognizing student interests, passions and capabilities
- enabling student-student/teacher collaboration
- adaptable and accessible in traditional and non-traditional learning environments to all learners in a variety of formats
- print and digital formats including interactive digital objects and audio and accessed on an ongoing basis
- open and multiple modes of access and delivery
- current, relevant and accessible, to enable a new level of responsiveness to the world in which students live.



## **KEY CONCEPT: ASSESSMENT OF COMPETENCIES**

### **Process for Exploring the Key Concept**

In the dream/design phases delegates explored future possibilities and envisioned a common understanding for the assessment of competencies through a set of key stages from Kindergarten to Grade 12. Each table was assigned a competency and asked to consider the stages required to demonstrate a developmental progression of competence as well as provide descriptors of what is most important for students to know and be able to do at each stage to help describe the indicators for the competency. The template included a description of the competency from Inspiring Action on Education (2010).

### **A Common Understanding of Assessment of Competencies**

Competence is evident in a student's ability to apply attitudes, skills and knowledge in relevant contexts. Since the learner moves through a developmental progression of cognitive, affective and psychomotor development, assessment of competencies is ongoing. Learning is assessed as students demonstrate the degree to which a competency is developed. A continuum is used to identify and describe the progression of levels of competence within a competency.

Delegates further characterized assessment of competencies as including competency models that:

- have a range of categories and levels
- include clear assessable targets for learning
- consider the developmental characteristics of learners.

## **KEY CONCEPT: ASSESSMENT**

### **Process for Exploring the Key Concept**

The dream/design phases were supported by the assessment research report, *Successful Assessment for Learning Projects* from the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS) Cycle 3, which identifies change in teaching practice and improving student learning in Alberta. Dr. David Townsend of the University of Lethbridge shared the key findings from the report describing a broad range of success indicators and stories to demonstrate how assessment can support students' learning and "learning how to learn for a lifetime." In the dream phase delegates described what they imagined assessment will look like in 2020 through the lens of a teacher/administrator, a student, a parent, a community member, an employer or post secondary educator. They addressed assessment processes and approaches, the evidence required to guide learning and teaching, and discussed what the reports would look like that reveal student understanding, learning styles and preferences in a responsive curriculum. In the design phase delegates reflected on the data they collected in the dream phase of assessment and provided, as a table group, a common understanding of assessment when considering assessment processes, evidence, criteria and reports.



## **A Common Understanding of Assessment**

Assessment that supports student-centred learning is flexible and multifaceted. It represents the opportunity to ensure that students are integral to the assessment process and indicates that learning is progressing based upon reliable, valid data. Both formative and summative assessments (for, of, as), embedded within learning, are necessary at a level suitable to the students' needs and abilities to capture what students know, are able to do, and reflect on as they learn. Provincial assessment determines if students are learning what they are expected to learn and whether or not they have achieved the standards. Results are reported and used to shape improvement in learning at all levels across the system.

Delegates further characterized assessment as:

- being adaptable and responsive to current and developing research theory and practice
- developed to demonstrate the acquisition of competencies and subject discipline content
- personalized and authentic engagement that:
  - reflects the needs of the learner
  - makes available a variety of assessment types, e.g., performance assessment, self assessment, tests
  - informs the learner where they are and the next steps in their learning process
- outlining clearly articulated criteria that:
  - define the purpose for assessing
  - are fair, technically sound and valid
  - ensure high quality evidence of learning
  - provide exemplars of student work
  - provide relevant and meaningful feedback
  - provide clear timely reporting that adds value for learning and teaching
  - consider the balance and integration between learning and assessment
- creating a dialogue among learners, teachers, parents, administrators and other stakeholders.



## NEXT STEPS

The common understandings for each of the key concepts derived from the collated information from the roundtables will help inform the drafting of descriptors for the guiding principles for curriculum design. These guiding principles will contribute to the shaping of draft standards and guidelines for the development of future provincial curriculum.

On September 29 to 30, 2011, Alberta Education and The Alberta Teachers' Association will co-host a symposium as part of continuing discussions on the design of future provincial curriculum. At the symposium, participants will engage in a collaborative dialogue to shape recommendations for new student learning outcomes as part of the Goals and Standards for Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education.

Alberta Education extends sincere thanks to all participants in the research roundtable discussions for *Action on Curriculum*.



## APPENDIX A

### PARTICIPANT EVALUATION

263 of a total 487 roundtable participants responded to an online survey regarding the roundtable they attended. Amongst these participants, the event was highly rated as indicated by the following responses:

- 93% agreed or strongly agreed that the roundtable content and presentations were successful in bringing forth research useful to inform curriculum redesign
- 90.7% agreed or strongly agreed that the goals of the roundtables were clearly defined
- 83.8% agreed or strongly agreed that the goals of the roundtables were achieved
- 92.3% agreed or strongly agreed that the roundtables provided them with the opportunity for meaningful involvement.

Delegates indicated that they appreciated the diversity at the tables, with student participation highlighted as being of special value. The opportunity for collaborative development was seen as excellent, with dialogue generally conducted in a respectful, collegial manner and with delegates showing strong commitment to the tasks at hand. They brought substantial expertise to the table, resulting in rich dialogue.

Delegates also noted the excellence of the table facilitators, who guided them through each of the tasks with respect, openness and patience, and of the recorders, who diligently and accurately noted the comments.

In regards to improvements that could be made, delegates indicated it was challenging to review and digest the large quantity of collected research literature reviews and research summaries of peer-reviewed articles posted on the event Moodle. Also challenging was engaging such a diverse group of people in bringing, sharing and reviewing such a large amount of information within a two-day time period.